

The Plan Schemes and Interior Elements of the Existing Mosques Built During the Ottoman Empire Period in Albania

Edmond Manahasa

(PhD Student, Architectural Design Program, Istanbul Technical University, Turkey)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the plan schemes and spatial organization of the existing mosques built during Ottoman Empire period in Albania. The historical information and partially the plan schemes are taken from the existing sources. Those buildings that had no plan schemes were taken out through surveying. The buildings are also examined on the site and the relevant visual material has been provided, to explain the interior elements. The study is organized according to a chronological order. Each building is explained by giving introductory information about the builder and the time of the mosques and then by examining the plan schemes. In conclusion the features of plan schemes of the existing mosques built during Ottoman Empire period in Albania are compared between each other defining their typology and revealing the architectural values of these buildings.

1. INTRODUCTION

The historical buildings play a very important role in defining the “genius loci” of one place. This chain of identity could go until a collective memory level. The so called “Cultural Revolution” in other words a bad-famed demolition process, whose target where the religious buildings either mosques or churches in Albania almost “erased” these objects. The case study focused in the plan schemes and interior elements of the existing mosques built in Albania during the Ottoman Empire period is very important seen from this point of view.

In order to analyze and reveal the architectural features of these buildings one of the important aspects would be the study of plan schemes and interior elements. The buildings that this study focuses are analyzed one by one. There are nine existing mosques built during the Ottoman Empire Period in Albania. There are three mosques found in Berat: the one of Beyazid II, The Leaden Mosque and the one of Beqarëve. The mosque of Muradije is found in Vlorë, and The mosque of Pazar is found in Gjirokaster. The one of Nazireshës is found in Elbasan and the mosque of Haxhi Et-hem Beg found in Tirana. The mosque of Mirahor Ilyas Beg is founded in Korça. At last The mosque of Mehmet Pashe Bushatliu is found in Shkoder.

2. THE PLAN SCHEMES AND INTERIOR ELEMENTS

2.1. MOSQUE OF MIRAHOR ILYAS BEG IN KORÇË

2.1.1. Introduction

The mosque of Mirahor İlyas Beg is the only existing Ottoman monument in the city of Korçë. The mosque of Mirahor İlyas Beg is situated nearby the center of Korçë. The mosque is built by Mirahor İlyas Beg in 1495-96 (901AH)¹. The date is mentioned at the inscription over the entrance door.

2.1.2. The Plan Scheme and Interior Elements

The mosque of Mirahor Ilyas Beg consists of two parts: the prayer hall and the last prayer hall. The prayer hall has a square scheme plan. The side of the square is 11.75 meters long. The mosque has a strong image and a cubic mass which rises over the square plan. The interior of the mosque is white washed and a bit dark because of the small amount of daylight enters to it. The last prayer hall consists of a rectangular plan scheme which has three piers forming a structure of three arcades (Figure 1).

The niche of mihrap of the mosque is adorned with golden gilt and it is transited to the wall by the usage of muqarnas. The muqarnas has got a regular triangular form. The mihrap is taken into two rectangular golden-gilt frames.

The minber of the mosque is wooden one and it is at the right side of the mihrap. It is dominated by two different tones of green combined with grey and the golden gilt. It is constructed on a wooden base raised from the ground at the height of two risers. The surface under the stairs is covered by wooden elements, being designed in geometrical shapes (Figure 4).

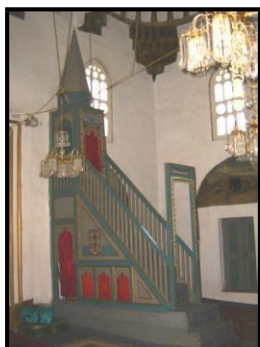
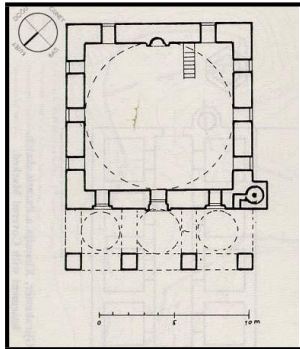


Figure 1: The plan of the Mosque of Mirahor Ilyas beg in Korça (from M. Kiel)

Figure 2: Perspective view of south-east (qibla) and north-east façades

Figure 3: The transition to the dome provided with squinches Figure

4: The wooden minber of the Mirahor İlyas Beg Mosque Figure 5:

The predication podium placed in the north-east wall

Figure 6: The women's gallery of the mosque of Mirahor Ilyas Beg in Korça

The podium of predication used for the Friday prayers is placed in the north-east wall of the mosque. It stays in a consoled bracket which has the lower part white washed. Its upper part has a

wooden balcony and is designed in silver gilt rectangular frames. The rectangular surfaces inside the frames are painted in golden gilt color (Figure 5).

The wooden balcony providing the function of women's gallery just is over the entrance door and is in green color. It has wooden embellished vertical elements in the balustrade, which are painted with white color. The middle part of this structure has a console balcony protruding through the prayer hall. The balusters are thicker and higher than normal vertical elements and are painted green color (Figure 6).

2.2. THE LEADEN MOSQUE IN BERAT

2.2.1 Introduction

The Leaden Mosque of Berat is one of the best Ottoman buildings preserved in Berat and also in whole Albania. It is the only domed mosque of Berat. This building is situated about five hundred meters east to the Bayezid Mosque, which is located at the city centre. The mosque is constructed by a local Noble called Uzgur Ahmet Beg. Sulejman Dashi² an Albanian scholar gives the date as 1553-1554, which he based on the copy of the inscription once founded in the mosque

2.2.2. The Plan Scheme and Interior Elements

The building consists of a prayer hall, minaret and last payer hall. The prayer hall has a square formed plan, whose exterior side is 12, 48 meters ³ and is covered by a dome. The thickness of the wall is 1.05m (Figure 7).

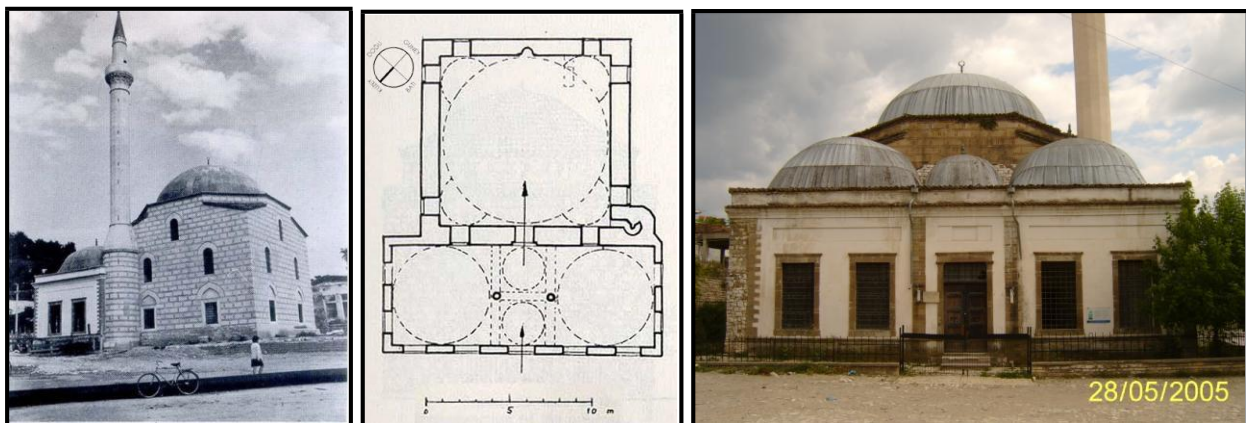


Figure 7: The Leaden Mosque of Berat after the restoration in 1978

Figure 8: The plan of Leaden Mosque in Berat (from M. Kiel)

Figure 9: The north-west (entrance) façade of the Lead Mosque in Berat

The present last prayer hall consists of transverse rectangular plan (Figure 8). It is wider than the prayer hall a feature which was also at the Mosque of Beyazid II in Berat. Evliya Çelebi⁴ had noted that the building had seven domes. The traces of a curb roof in the north-west façade adjacent to the last prayer hall, tells us that there must have been done another intervention, after

the first construction. Today the last prayer hall has only four domes. Two of them are larger and cover the lateral parts of the porch. There are two marble columns at the centre of the porch, which carry the two small domes at the center (Figure 9).

2.3. THE MOSQUE OF MURADIJE IN VLORA

2.3.1. Introduction

The mosque of Muradije is the only existing monument built during Ottoman Empire period in Vlora (Figure 10). The building is situated on one of the main roads of the city. Actually we don't have certain information related to its date of construction. Gj. Frasheri and S. Dashi considering the construction in Kanuni's time, attribute the mosque to an early work of Master Sinan.⁵

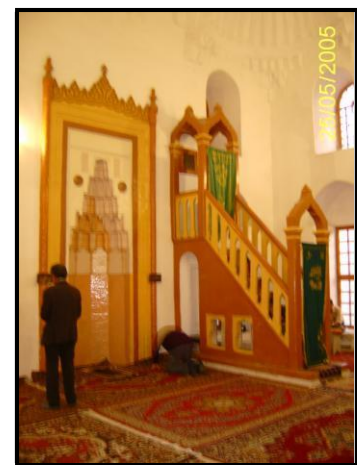
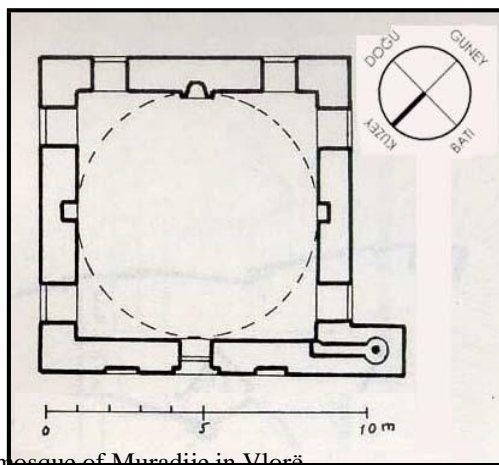


Figure 10: The south-west façade of the mosque of Muradije in Vlora
Figure 11: The plan of Muradije mosque in Vlora (from M.Kiel) Figure 12: The mihrap and the minber of the mosque of Muradije

2.3.2. The Plan Scheme and Interior Elements

The building today consists of a prayer hall, a minaret and an opened last prayer hall, which is demolished in an uncertain date. The prayer hall has a square plan scheme, while the minaret of the building is positioned at the western corner of the building (Figure 11). The mosque actually is white washed internally, which must be a late operation. The internal white atmosphere of the building is broken by the mihrap and minber, which are painted in brown and yellow tones.

The mihrap is taken in a rectangular frame, whose outer contours consist of lateral elements pilaster-like protruded outside. The mihrap has a five sided plan scheme and the transition to the wall is made by a fine stalactite work (muqarnas). The mihrap is painted with different colors and this is a late operation made spontaneously. Thus today the stalactite work is painted in lilac- cream and orange colors (Figure 12).

The minber is situated in the left side of the mihrap adjacent to it. The door of the minber is constructed by two columns which has the capitals decorated with diagonal embossed elements.

The columns are connected with an Ottoman pointed arch, the top part of which ends in a pyramidal form. The same concept used in the door frame is used in the landing part of the minber. Four post are joined with Ottoman pointed arches which are protruded toward each one forming a pointed cross vault. The pointed cross vault is decorated with the same pyramidal cap. The solution is original and local.

2.4. THE MOSQUE OF NAZIRESHËS IN ELBASAN

2.4.1. Introduction

The mosque of Nazireshes is the only preserved mosque of Elbasan. The mosque is situated in the southern suburb of Elbasan, a few hundred meters to the north of the river Shkumbin and aside the national street (Figure 13). Vehbi Buharaja known for his study made on the Ottoman inscriptions in Albania says: “The mosque of Nazireshës was built before the year 1599, as we understand from the two notes in its interior”.⁶

2.4.2. The Plan Scheme and Interior Elements

The mosque of Nazireshës a square plan schemed building. The outer side dimension of the square is 10.70 meters, while the inner space is 8.70 meters. The mihrap makes the transition to the wall by a (muqarnas) stalactite work. It has only a central prayer hall, which results in a cubic mass. (Figure 14).

The mosque during the communist regime period has been closed and still today its interior is white washed. Based on that the only valuable element is its mihrab, which in fact has lost its brilliance (Figure 15).

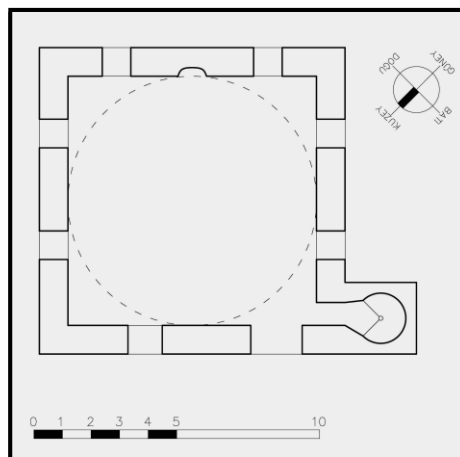


Figure 13 General view of the Mosque of Nazireshës in Elbasan

Figure 14 The plan of the Mosque of Nazireshës in Elbasan

Figure 15 The plaster decoration in mihrap of the mosque of Nazireshës in Elbasan

2.5. THE MOSQUE OF PAZAR IN GJIROKASTER

2.5.1. Introduction

The mosque of Pazar in Gjirokastrë is one of the best buildings that still remains in South Albania. It is situated at an inclined side, under the old castle of the city (Figure 17). The building is constructed in 1168 AH (1754-55) and this is understandable from the Ottoman inscription put just over the entrance door.⁷

2.5.2. The Plan Scheme and Interior Elements

As it is mentioned before, the mosque of Pazar is situated at the middle of traditional market (Old Çarşı), and it is constructed over an inclined site. The site needed a different solution and the mosque was constructed over a covered market. The mosque consists of three spaces the prayer hall, the last prayer hall and the lodge of imam. The platform over the shops is 15.90 meters wide; while the prayer hall has a square schemed plan which has a side 11.40 meters.⁸ The remaining area at the left part of the mosque was used as a lodge for the imam (Figure 16).



Figure 16 The plan of the mosque of Pazar in Gjirokastrë (from M. Kiel) Figure 17 The south-west façade of the Mosque of Pazar in Gjirokastrë Figure 18 The inner south-west façade of Mosque of Pazar in Gjirokastrë Figure 19 The mihrab niche of the mosque of Pazar

Today the interior of the mosque is painted in rose color (Figure 18). The surfaces that are taken inward are painted by a darker rose color. The mihrab due to this painting in this building seems more like a niche and is supported by two vertical semicircular planed niches which end with rectangle planed pilasters from the two sides (Figure 19). The mosque must have submitted interventions during the dictatorial regime of Enver Hoxha, because in the interior there is no any decoration left, except a circular one around the centre of the dome. It is a kind of big medallion having more than seven belts, which are adorned by different decorations.

2.6. THE MOSQUE OF MEHMET PASHE BUSHATLLIU IN SHKODËR

2.6.1. Introduction

The mosque of Mehmet Pashe Bushatlliu is the only building left in Shkoder that was built in the Ottoman period. At the same time it is the largest building in Shkoder and in Albania. The mosque is built by Mehmet Pashe Bushatlliu in 1773-74.

2.6.2. The Plan Scheme and Interior Elements

The Mosque of Mehmet Pashe Bushatlliu is inspired by the great Sultanlic mosques of Istanbul. It has big dimensions and a different plan scheme. The mosque is composed of the prayer hall, the courtyard and the minaret (Figure 20).

The prayer hall has a square plan scheme, which has the internal side approximately ten meters long. The prayer hall has an apsidal rectangle protruded at the front part forming a special space dominated by mihrap. At the north-eastern facade of the prayer hall there is an arcaded portico, which stands over two rounded monolithic stone columns and masonry wall at the extreme corners.

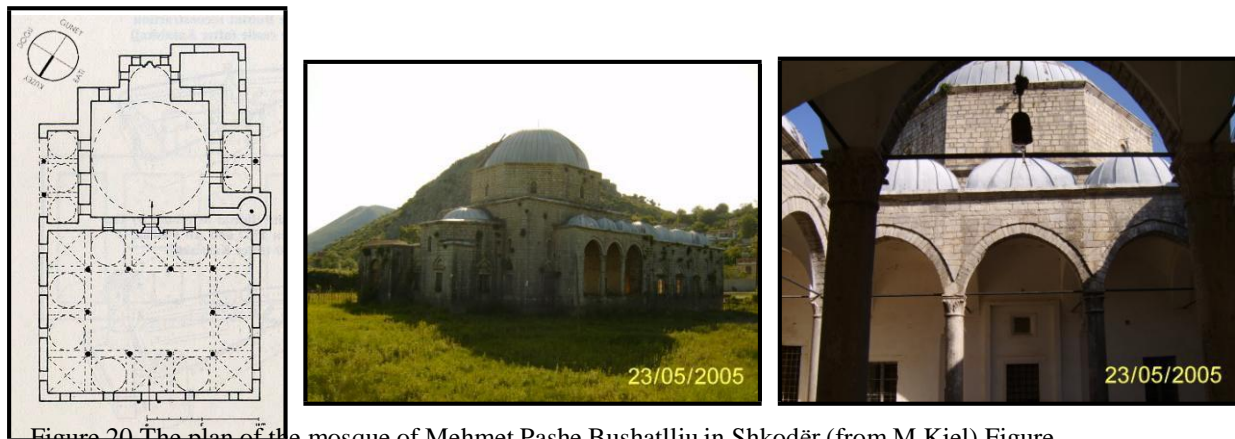


Figure 20 The plan of the mosque of Mehmet Pashe Bushatlliu in Shkodër (from M.Kiel) Figure

21 General view of the Mosque of Mehmet Pashë Bushatlliu

Figure 22 The pendentive and the brick dome at the lateral porchs

The prayer hall has a square plan scheme, which has the internal side approximately ten meters long. The prayer hall has an apsidal rectangle protruded at the front part forming a special space dominated by mihrap. At the north-eastern facade of the prayer hall there is an arcaded portico, which stands over two rounded monolithic stone columns and masonry wall at the extreme corners. In the western corner is found the minaret, which is protruded in a rectangular form outside the lateral contour of the mosque. At the south-western façade of the prayer hall, there is another arcaded portico, this time standing over one rounded monolithic stone column and masonry wall at the extreme corners, due to the backward space used for the construction of the minaret. Adjacent to the front eastern corner of the prayer hall there is a tomb whose sides extend from the apsidal front part to the arcaded porch. According to Kiel⁹ the tomb once was covered by a wooden structure.

The courtyard has rectangle plan scheme, and its outer dimensions are 19.60 x 15.40 m (Figure 22). There are ten monolithic stone columns put in a rectangular order 4 x 3 which carry ten arcades that run around the courtyard to form fourteen units of space (Figure 20). The level of the arcades is almost 40 cm. higher than the one of the other area of the courtyard. The stone columns have capitals adorned with floral embossed motives and they are connected with each other with horizontal iron bars.

The Mosque often is overflowed by the Drin river who passes nearby and the due to this the interior space is whitewashed, in order to maintain the cleanliness. The mosque is used very

rarely and based on that mostly it is closed. The photos were able to be taken only from the windows.

2.7. THE MOSQUE OF HAXHI ET-HEM BEG IN TIRANA

2.7.1. Introduction

The mosque of Et-hem Beg is the best maintained building in Albania and the only one built in Ottoman period that exists today in Tirana (Figure 22). The construction of mosque of Haxhi Et-hem Beg was began by Molla Beg in 1793-94 (1208 AH), which was the grant-son of the founder of Tirana Sulejman Pashë Mulleti. The minaret, the last prayer hall and the paintings were finished by the son of Molla Beg, Hadji Et-hem Beg in 1822-23 (1238 AH).¹⁰

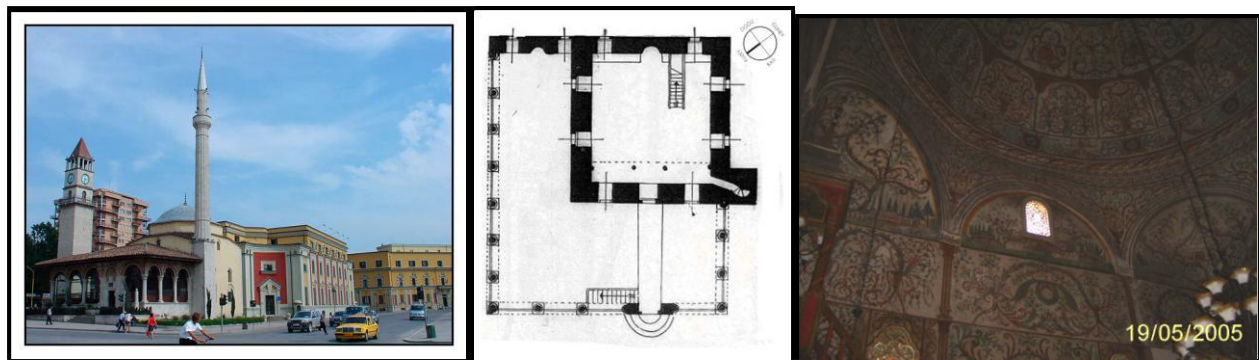


Figure 23 General view of the mosque of Haxhi Et-hem Beg mosque from Skenderbeg square

Figure 24 The transition from the cubic mass to the dome

Figure 25 Longitudinal section (from A. Meksi and Gj. Frasheri)



Figure 26 The minber of the mosque of Haxhi Ethem Beg

Figure 27 The women's gallery of the mosque of Haxhi Ethem Beg

Figure 28 The last prayer hall of the mosque of Haxhi Et-hem Beg in Tirana

2.7.2. The Plan Scheme and Interior Elements

The mosque consists of three parts; the prayer hall, the last prayer hall and the minaret. The prayer hall has square plan scheme, which has a side of 10.50 m. The interior of the mosque

is dominated by wine red which is combined with green on a lovely yellow cream background. The lower part of the inner walls is white washed forming a band of 2.20 m. high that turns around the space (Figure 27).

The mihrap of the building is taken in three surrounding frames, which are protruded from the line of the wall. All of the frames are adorned in different ways. The mihrap has a half cylindrical form and the transition to the wall is realized by a conical form. The lower part of the mihrap is white washed, while the upper part until to the end of the cylindrical part is decorated with floral motives (Figure 26). The minber of the building is a wooden masterpiece, which is maintained in good state. The front part begins with door, which has a golden-gilt arch. The lateral parts of the minber are covered by a complete triangle, which begins from the lower part of the stair and ends in the landing part. The balustrade consists of slim vertical wooden elements, which are joined with a massive brownish rail. The landing part of the minber is covered by a wooden baldaquin of the same brown color. The baldaquin is surrounded by a cornice and covered with a pyramidal cap which ends in a crescent (Figure 26).

The women's gallery is entered from the stairs of the minaret and is constructed over two marble columns which are adjacent to the lateral walls. The structure of the women's gallery is wooden made. The balustrade is constituted from the embellished circular profiled vertical bars and big balusters painted in red-brownish and dark green colors. The women's gallery must have been constructed in the same time with the mosque (Figure 27).

The last prayer hall has an "L" form plan scheme (Figure 28). It consists of a space adjacent to the north-eastern part of the prayer hall and the usual area adjacent to the north-west (entrance) façade of the prayer hall. Second Kiel¹¹ the building must have been surrounded by other buildings and the site at that time would not be suitable for the construction of the other side of the last prayer hall. After the World War II the centre of Tirana was redesigned again and the surrounding buildings were cleaned so that the mosque could free itself in the position that we see today.

2.8. THE MOSQUE OF BEQAREVE IN BERAT

2.8.1. Introduction

The mosque of Beqareve is situated at the lower part of Mangalem quarter of Berat aside the main street of the city. The mosque is built in 1243 AH (1827/28) by Sulejman Pashë Vlora, but in fact it is known popularly as "Mosque of Beqareve". It means the mosque of Bachelors in English.¹²

2.8.2. The Plan Scheme and Interior Elements

The mosque is composed of two main parts the prayer hall and the porch. One of the basic design factors in this building has been the site. Since it has a sloping site, to obtain a platform, the rock was cut partially. In the street site it is provided by three barrel vaults. The space under the barrel vaults is used as shops. The barrel vaults are supported by four stone columns (Figure 29).

The plan scheme of the prayer hall consists of a rectangle having the sides 11.25 x 9.63m. long (Figure 30). The mihrap of the mosque ends in a conical shape on which motives of triangular shape are painted, giving the image of a stalactite work. There is no original minber in this object. Its function is performed by a wooden stair of spontaneous work.

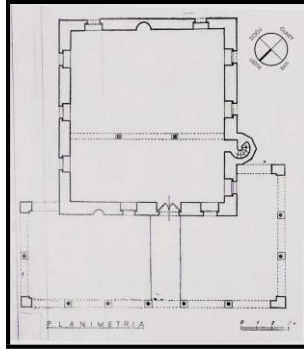


Figure 29 General view of the mosque of Beqarëve in Berat

Figure 30 The plan of the Mosque of the Beqareve (from A. Meksi)

Figure 31 The arches dividing the prayer hall in two spaces

At equal distances from the lateral sides and almost four meters from the entrance wall two wooden piers, supporting three arches, divide the central prayer hall into south-eastern and north-western parts. These piers carry the ceiling of the prayer hall. The division is emphasized more with the different decorations made in the walls and ceiling. An inward curving frieze of plaster runs all around the ceiling of the south-eastern part, forming a 45 degree plane over which are written in calligraphic style the ninety-nine beautiful names of God. The ceiling of the south-eastern part is emphasized by a wide wooden frame turning around, while the ceiling of the north-western part has a narrower frame. The ceiling of inner space is decorated with wooden grid motives (Figure 31).

The last prayer hall has a plan a scheme in form of “L” (Figure 30). It has a width 16.90 m. It is protruded 2.45 meters from each of the lateral parts of the prayer hall. The entrance of the building is at the north-west façade of the last prayer hall. The entrance is provided by a path which has a level almost 50 cm lower than the ground level of the last prayer hall. Four “L” formed masonry piers are placed at the corners of the space.

2.9. The Mosque of Bayezid II in Berat

2.9.1 Introduction

The mosque of Bayezid II is situated in the northern part of the main square, which practically is the centre of Berat (Figure 32). Locally it is named as the mosque of the Ruler (King). According to the inscription found by Vehbi Buharaja, it is written that the reconstruction of the mosque was finished in the year 1248 AH (1832-1833). The reconstruction was made by the Grand Vizier of the Empire Mehmed Reşit Paşa.¹³

2.9.2 The Plan Scheme and Interior Elements

The mosque is composed of two main spaces; the prayer hall and the last prayer hall. The prayer hall is a rectangle having 16, 85 x 13, 95 measures. The sizes of the prayer hall are approximately the same as the measures given by Evliya Çelebi who mentioned them as 50 x 60 feet. The wall is 85 cm thick and its material is limestone (Figure 32).

The last prayer hall of the mosque has a mass wider than the prayer hall itself and its plan consists of a width-wise rectangle. It is extended from the left part until to the projection of the women's gallery's stair and from the right part until to the projection of the minaret's base. Although today it is not used, there is a main entrance from the last prayer hall to the prayer hall. Two niches are placed in the exterior side of north-western wall of the prayer hall, which looks to the last prayer hall (Figure 33).

The women's gallery is a work of great mastery (Figure 34). It is constructed over the backward wooden posts seen in the plan and its middle part protrudes like a balcony of semi-circular plan scheme, while its lateral parts extent until to the load bearing columns of the domes. An Ottoman "Tuğra" is still present; at the capital of one of the wooden piers that carries the women's gallery. The ceiling under the women's gallery is also adorned simply with octagonal formula by breaking the corners diagonally. The red wine and the brown colors are used to cover the ceiling (Figure 35). As we know there has not been women's gallery in the 15th century during the reign of Bayezid II. The decorations in this part are executed after the reconstruction made by the Grand Vizier of the Empire Mehmed Reşit Paşa in 1829-33¹⁴.



Figure 32 General view of the mosque of Beyazid II in Berat

Figure 33 Plan of the Mosque of Beyazid II in Berat (from M. Kiel)

Figure 34 The wooden decoration in the backward dome and women's gallery

Figure 35 The minber and inner south-west façade of Bayezid II mosque in Berat

Figure 36 The plaster decoration in the minber of the mosque of Beyazid II in Berat

Figure 37 The last prayer hall of the mosque of Bayezid II in Berat

3. CONCLUSION

The plan schemes of the prayer halls generally are squares, except the plan scheme of the mosque of Beyazid II and the one of Beqarëve in Berat. The plan schemes of the prayer halls of these mosques consist of longitudinally extended rectangles.

The women's gallery is found in the mosque of Beyazid II in Berat, mosque of Mirahor Ilyas Beg in Korça, the Lead Mosque in Berat, mosque of Muradije in Vlorë, mosque of Nazireshtës in Elbasan, mosque of Mehmet Pashë Bushatlliu in Shkodër and mosque of Haxhi Ethem Beg in Tirana. The women's galleries of the mosque of Muradije in Vlorë, Lead Mosque in Berat, mosque of Nazireshtës in Berat, mosque of Mehmet Pashë Bushatlliu in Shkodër are structures added after 1992. They do not carry historical architectural values and for this reason are not studied.

The women's galleries of the mosques of Beyazid II in Berat, Mirahor Ilyas Beg in Korça and Haxhi Ethem Beg in Tirana are works of 19th century. The women's gallery of the mosque of Beyazid II in Berat is an operation made after the reconstruction made by the Grand Vizier of the Empire Mehmed Reşit Paşa in 1829-33. The women's gallery of the mosque of Mirahor Ilyas Beg in Korça must be a work of Dervish Islam Beg who made the first repair of the building in 1833-34 or Salih Beg who made the second repair in 1868-69. The women's gallery of the mosque of Ethem Beg in Tirana is a work of Molla Beg built in 1793-94 or Haxhi Ethem Beg who completed the construction in 1822-23. The women's gallery of the mosque of Haxhi Ethem Beg in Tirana and the one of the mosque of Mirahor Ilyas Beg in Korça design concept. They have a transversal extended rectangle plan and are placed just over the entrance adjacent to the north-western wall of the prayer hall. The women's gallery of the mosque of Beyazid II in Berat is positioned in the same place but its middle part protrudes like a balcony having a semi-circular plan scheme, while its lateral parts extend until to the load bearing columns of the domes.

¹ Kiel, M. (1990) Ottoman Architecture in Albania 1385-1912, Research Centre For Islamic History, Art And Culture, Istanbul.

² Dashi, S. (1980) Tradita ne Arkitekture dhe ne Art, Insituti i Monumenteve te Kultures dhe i Arteve, Tirane. p. 101

³ Op.cit.

⁴ Evliya Çelebi., 1999. Seyahatname, *Albania Section VIII*, Engin Yayınları, İstanbul. p.554-568

⁵ Frasheri, Gj. and Dashi, S. (1988) Fillimet e Artit Islamik ne Qytetin e Beratit, *Monumentet*, 1, 122

⁶ Buharaja, V. (1968) Mbishkrimet turko-arabe te vendit tone si deshmi historike, *Konferenca e dyte e studimeve albanologjike*, Tirane, Albania.

⁷ Kiel, M. (1990)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. p.233

¹⁰ Rey, L. and Ceka, H. (1935) Le Mosquee de Ethem Bey, Albania, V, Paris.

¹¹ Op.cit. p.251

¹² Ekrem Bey Vlore, (1911). Aus Berat und Vom Tomor, Zur Kunde des Balkanhanbainsels, Sarajevo.

¹³ Buharaja, V. (1968)

¹⁴ Frasheri, Gj. and Dashi, S. (1988) p.122